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ABSTRACT

Despite demands for innovative classroom techniques, many educational-administration professors continue to use the lecture paradigm in their courses. This paper argues for a "virtually real" classroom, which demonstrates to students the reformed school that they will facilitate as future administrators. It also discusses the need for professors of educational administration to assume new roles in their classrooms, that of facilitators and mentors. The most important component in the virtually real classroom is considered to be the student. Some innovative components of an educational administration course include: (1) student choice; (2) team work and collaborative learning processes; (3) school-based problem solving; (4) authentic tasks focused on problem solving; and (5) authentic assessment. (Contains 26 references.) (LMI)

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Virtual Reality in Educating Leaders: First Renew the Professor

Reform is asking for new kinds of classrooms (de Charms, 1976; Costa, 1991; Kagan, 1990; Katz & Rath, 1985; Gardner, 1983; Spady, 1993; Schulmann, 1987; Deci and Ryan, 1985; Sizer, 1992; Knowles, 1990), but the old lecture paradigm persists. Classrooms can not be the reality aspiring school administrators will experience, but appropriate classrooms for these candidates can be "virtually real" if administrator educators are willing to renew themselves.

Educational Administration Professor Must Model Renewal

Reform is asking classroom teachers to encourage active learning and to share responsibility and decision-making with the students (Katz & Rath, 1985; Kohn, 1993; Broadwell, 1977; Kentucky Department of Education, 1993). It is strategic that future school leaders experience this new classroom themselves. Yet, most of educational administration students have completed their undergraduate work before these precepts were implemented. Perhaps too few educational administration students will ever experience a "transformed instructional class" even in their most recent training. Joe Murphy, after studying responses from the chairs of 74 departments of

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educational administration across the nation says "we developed a sense that instructional issues continue to lurk in the background." He saw only slight to moderate changes in instructional approaches (Murphy, 1991, p.55). This predisposition of educational administration professors to be hesitant to change may evolve to their students, practicing administrators, being unwilling to change. One analyst perceives that administrators and their organizational structures are more likely to be impediments to change than catalysts (Chubb, 1988). Murphy's study overall sees "moderate" unfocused response to reform by departments of educational administration (Murphy, 1991).

Professors of educational administration need to model for their students by demonstrating that reform is worth doing, and it starts in the classroom. The Rational Action Leadership Model (RALM) (Berkheim, 1994) synthesizes the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) 12 leadership dimensions--the professional skills (Hersey, 1977) and the six curricular domains suggested by Hoyle, English and Steffy (1990). These components extrapolate to a 70% focus on the classroom directly. Those components which focus on learning are the foundations of education, knowledge based components, supervision and staff development, research and analysis, and curriculum and instruction The personal skills that often focus on instruction

are educational values, sensitivity, judgement, organizational ability, problem analysis, leadership, stress tolerance, and oral and written communication. All of these expectations can be demonstrated by an educational administration professor in a reform responsive classroom.

This "reform classroom" made virtually real" then to educational administration students should demonstrate the reformed school that future administrators must facilitate. The reform literature on problem-based learning (Muth, Martin, Murphy, & Sanders, 1994), project based learning (Kilpatrick, 1918), andragogy (Knowles, 1990), motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985), and multiple intelligence (Gardner, 1983) can be used to exemplify what must occur when educational theory meets practice.

New Roles for Leaders

Not only do new classroom processes need to be modeled, but professors of educational administration need to assume new roles that will model roles expected of administrators in environments of reform. The choices allowed primary students by early childhood educators (Kohn, 1993) are appropriate for educational administration students. To extend this freedom of choice, professors must be willing to be facilitators and mentors rather than lecturers. Autonomy and involvement of stakeholders were found in John Chubb's

(1988) research to be necessary for schools to be effective. In a study of 35 superintendents in a reforming environment in Kentucky, it was found that they felt they are developing more interactive relationships with others. They are serving more as facilitators. They feel they must "lead" not drive (Murphy, 1993). This autonomy and involvement of participants can begin in the model classes provided by professors willing to provide those components within the educational administration classroom.

The implications from adult learning theory also indicate that adult students see themselves as capable of self direction and desire others to respect that self-directing capacity (Broadwell, 1977; Stallion, 1993). Adult readiness to learn is best identified by the adult learner (Knowles, 1990). Therefore, students must be given choices within their studies to provide them leadership opportunities and more appropriate motivation for learning. Students need an opportunity to experience a community that involves stakeholders and manages consensually.

The virtual reality classroom for educational administration students is a viable opportunity to learn. Reading and reflecting on research and best practice, acting on this new knowledge with other professional educators gathering data

on the results of those actions, reflecting on that data and making necessary changes is a cycle that is continuous. Establishing this cycle of thinking and reflection into the administrators work ethic is a disposition all educators need to establish (Katz and Rath, 1985). This is not inculcated by someone lecturing as a primary learning tool. Direct instruction as the main focus does not prepare students to be responsible, thoughtful administrators with action plans, nor does it provide practice in problem solving. Future school leaders must manage troubling events that are occurring in schools with increasing frequency. A Yale University team of planners who advocate pro active prevention-oriented crisis plans for schools have "nailed" administration programs with their perspective that the typical administration certification program devotes no attention to crisis management. (Lichenstein, Schonfield & Kline. 1994).

The "virtual" connotation of this classroom strategy is important. Administrators need to be cognizant of others' thoughts, research and experience in administration. If students' training consists solely of "actual" field-based experience, the training would be limited to the experience of that event and that on-site mentor. The field-based practicum and internship are an important part of an administration candidate's training (Griffiths, 1988), but

experiences that encourage readings, investigations, problem solving (Costa, 1991), planning, implementing solutions, assessing those solutions, and collaborative work can embody the "virtual reality" of administration that inculcates a disposition to life-long study, learning and professional improvement. To place a candidate in an administrative position without "virtually realistic" studies that are perceived as important to his or her growth is to place that candidate at risk of failure or, at best, mediocrity.

Personal Stories of Self-Renewal From a Traditional Instructor

This traditional instructor in renewing herself tried many of these components. This kind of classroom is not one that can be formulated overnight but one that must be constructed in small increments (Glickman, 1989) as educational administration professors strive to reform themselves . This change uses problem-based learning (Muth, Martin, Murphy & Sanders, 1994), project-based learning (Kilpatrick, 1918), portfolios, real tasks, and cooperative group dynamics (Kagan, 1990). There are interviews of stakeholders, shadowing of administrator practitioners, action research (Perry-Sheldon & Allain, 1988), reflection journals and computers to help students gain a broad perspective of the educational administration knowledge base and skills (Berkum, 1994). The most important component in a renewal classroom is the

student. The following are a few early self-renewing attempts of an education administrator professor.

1. Choices

Students make decisions that govern much of the class. a. The syllabus was issued as a framework rather than an edict. b. Pairs of students chose from a range of issues relevant to the course, the one or ones most relevant to their needs. c. An individual concerns project was chosen by each student.

The goals were to provide students experiences in autonomy as well as the opportunity to develop interpersonal skills needed to be a team worker and/or leader (Hersey, 1977).

2. Collaboration

Team work and collaborative learning processes were extended in another class. a. This class decided that motivation was a key element in working with school personnel. They read motivation research and found areas in which these researchers had common ground whether it was business, industry or education. This synthesis was presented for an article. b. This same class surveyed personnel policies in their 12 respective districts. The data this study generated resulted in an article submitted.

This collaborative effort proved to each student the intrinsic motivation and energy generated when all worked for a common goal.

3. School as Center of Problem Solving

Solving real school problems was the goal of one class on school and community relations. These students chose critical issues in their own community for their project. One student's school district's image had been damaged by news coverage about a sexually mature survey mistakenly disseminated to 4th graders. The survey originally intended for 8-12 students was to enable grant writers to provide a need for family resource and youth service centers. This student a central office administrator, prepared a video broadcast about the school and its history of service to the families and youth of the community. Her video tape described further needs of the community to be addressed. This tape was used by the district at local civic gatherings. This real task did much to heal a wound in the community and rebuild a supportive relationship with the school.

4. Other Tasks That Focus on Problem Solving

An authentic task is an assignment or activity that students perceive as one necessary for their future competency (Spady, 1993) in administration. The

best tasks reflect closely the real tasks of an instructional leader in the field and provide time to research, plan, assess and reflect.

In a school facilities class, one student, an assistant principal, with the help of others in her school, planned a renovation that converted a storage space into a music room--that renovation became a reality in her school. Another student, a principal, gathered information from teachers for the architect planning her school's renovation. Another student, a teacher, served on a local facilities planning committee. His position was to save the small community high school in which he taught. His studies were enriched by his passion. These activities were authentic, giving the students and their teammates a taste of virtual reality or reality itself. Some authentic products from students' issues of choice have been.

a. action plans

b. media preparations necessary to communicate with the public.

c. diagrams of environments that prevent or may alleviate problems or facilitate learning

d. survey of stakeholders regarding local issues and analysis of that data

5. Authentic Assessment

The assessment rubrics for evaluating these tasks were enriched by group discussions and formative feedback (Rina & Dutch, 1994). Their summative of their own work helped insure quality. This up front involvement of students in the assessment process helped students understand that quality issues were not just the purview of a professor but the responsibility of the students as well. These assessments were designed to be authentic. An authentic assessment is performance based, realistic and instructionaly appropriate. Products that are logical outcomes of an authentic task should be the basis for assessment. The rubric for these products should be prepared early in the term.

Continuous Renewal

This virtual reality model is rigorous because it focuses on students' perceived needs and authentic tasks and assessment. This is a rigorous model because students are engaged in producing a quality product. The students interest in "hot" issues motivates them intrinsically to seek "best research and practice".

The resulting candidates for administration should be conscientious students who work through literature, research, self-reflection and social filters to be

well-prepared, collaborative problem solvers. This difficult work is fueled by students' perception that this activity is worth doing and relates to their immediate concerns in education. This model of research, thinking, and group interaction, and often real school problem-solving can give students a "virtual reality" of school administration that prepares them for the on-the-job part of their training. This virtual reality model can give them a professional framework for continuous renewal.

To stimulate this renewal however educational administration professors must begin and arduous reinvention of graduate classroom expectations and a personal metanoia of previous roles in that classroom. The charge should be "First renew thyself" That is the first reality in producing a "virtual reality classroom."

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